

# ILLINOIS **FAMILIES** **Now and Forever**

Families by Foster Care, Adoption and Guardianship®

Department of Children and Family Services®



## **From the DCFS Director**

*Bryan Samuels*

The holiday season is a time to reflect on the many special blessings that come by way of families. Yet, for so many of our youth, positive family memories may be few. So I offer my personal thanks to all of the caregivers who step up and fill in the gap now and throughout the year.

In the year ahead, DCFS will continue to take a "lifetime approach" in planning for our youth. We will address the immediate concerns, while preparing for the time when their agency involvement concludes.

The department can point to progress already. We have devoted more resources to education and employment, providing an invaluable tool for youth in care and as they transition to adulthood. We are realigning resources and training front-line staff to serve families more effectively. We successfully launched Integrated Assessment to pinpoint clinical needs and the Child and Youth Investment Teams to build a platform for team decision-making.

As you reflect on the close of this year and plan for the next, please know that we pledge to be part of the solution.

## **Tax booklet gives money saving tax tips for caregivers**

It is time to gather all of the tax records and get ready to visit the tax preparer. For foster parents, adoptive parents, and legal guardians, changing family dynamics can complicate matters. In the often confusing array of rules and regulations, caregivers may not realize that they may qualify for what could be significant tax credits and deductions. Each year, DCFS and the Center for Economic Progress offer the Tax Booklet for Illinois Foster & Adoptive Parents. The Tax Booklet clarifies rules and gives examples about a variety of credits, dependency issues and qualifying children definitions.

For instance, the new Uniform Definition of Child could affect many parents of foster and adopted children. Due to this new tax law, foster children no longer have to live in the home for all 12 months of the year to be claimed as dependents. In most cases, a foster child who is under age 17 and lives with the foster parents for more than half the year will be a qualifying child for a dependency exemption, Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.

The Adoption Tax Credit is a significant tax benefit for parents who adopt. For 2005, the Adoption Tax Credit can be up to \$10,630 for each child adopted. Unused adoption credit can be carried forward five taxable years. So if a family does not use the entire amount of the credit in the year of the adoption, it can carry forward to offset future tax liability. As of 2003, parents who adopt a special needs child will receive the maximum tax credit for the year in which they adopt, even if actual expenses are less. Taxpayers who receive an adoption assistance subsidy can exclude income and thus pay less tax. For a special needs adoption this could result in a \$10,630 income exclusion, regardless of whether they actually had qualified adoption expenses. The credit will phase out based on higher incomes. The Booklet has more details.

Beyond information about tax benefits, the Tax Booklet also contains various tools and resources, such as free instruction books, phone numbers, and web

*Continued on page 2*

## tax tips, con't.

sites relevant to tax issues faced by foster and adoptive parents. The Booklet also lists free tax preparation sites offered by the Tax Counseling Project, a project of the Center for Economic Progress. In 2006, the Tax Counseling Project will run more than 30 sites throughout Illinois helping all Earned Income Tax Credit eligible families and individuals claim the Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax benefits. Last year, the Project helped bring back \$35.3 million in tax refunds to over 25,000 working families. Sites will be open at the end of January.

The Tax Booklet for Foster and Adoptive Parents is a valuable tool that can save families money at tax time. It is useful for those who prepare their own taxes and is a good resource for tax preparers to find guidelines specific to foster care and adoption. The booklet will be mailed to every household that receives the Families Now and Forever newsletter. If you do not receive a booklet, request one by sending an e-mail to [taxtraining@centerforprogress.org](mailto:taxtraining@centerforprogress.org) or by calling 312-252-0280. To find out about a free tax preparation site near you, refer to your Tax Booklet, visit [www.centerforprogress.org](http://www.centerforprogress.org), or call 312-409-6511 within the Chicago area or 888-827-8511 outside Chicago.



## DCFS Training offers first web-based course for foster parents

The DCFS Office of Training will soon have its first instructor-led, web-based training course available for caregivers. The web-based course blends the technology of a toll-free telephone call with the new DCFS Virtual Training Center web site. The interactive course will have the benefits of being "in class" without having to travel to a training site.

Foster parents will use the new DCFS Virtual Training Center web site to access the course content via the Internet. At the start of the course, caregivers will join a conference call, and a PRIDE trainer will guide the course as foster parents participate from their homes.

Foster parents completing the training will need:

- a personal computer with Internet access
- a telephone on its own line near the computer that is capable of making a toll free call (ideally with a speaker phone option)
- speakers or headphone set connected to the PC.

For those foster parents without the technical requirements in their homes, training computers will be available at DCFS locations.

The first web-based course is entitled "Child and Family Team Meetings for Caregivers" and is planned to begin at the start of 2006. For information about the



*Jean Maher, statewide manager for foster and adoptive parent training, describes the new on-line course to the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council.*

online training schedule, go to [www.DCFstraining.org](http://www.DCFstraining.org) or contact the local DCFS foster parent training college or university. To register, caregivers may call the DCFS registration unit at 877-800-3393 or call the PRIDE training school in their area.

As the DCFS Virtual Training Center continues its development, the Training Office will expand the offerings for on-line courses for foster parents. The DCFS Virtual Training Center will also house other on-line resources, such as: searchable training calendars, registration functions, training transcripts, and a resource library.

Caregivers who wish to stay updated via e-mail should send a note to Jean Maher, Statewide Manager of DCFS Foster & Adoptive Parent Training, at [Jmaher@idcfs.state.il.us](mailto:Jmaher@idcfs.state.il.us). Include your name, DCFS region and email address with your request.

## Register now for Caregivers Institutes

Last year's successful Caregivers Institutes will have an encore performance this year in nine, rather than four, locations around the state. The institutes deliver in-depth training by bringing caregivers a roster of expert speakers and resource providers tailored to the local community. This year's theme is Effecting Transition for Youth in Care—Resources for Caregivers and Youth. The training will focus on working together through changes with the following six sessions:

### 1) Permanent Connections from a Youth's Perspective

Testimonials from youth and their caregivers will illustrate how strong relationships help young people as they strive toward adulthood.

### 2) New Directions for DCFS

DCFS executive staff will explain several new initiatives to respond to the changing needs of youth in care and their caregivers.

### 3) Examining the Caregiver Role

Caregivers can amplify their voice as they advocate for youth through initiatives such as the Integrated Assessment program, the Child and Youth Investment Teams (CAYIT) and advisory councils.

### 4) Educational Advocacy

Education Advisors from the area will discuss changes to special education policies and new programs to ensure that youth and caregivers have positive school outcomes.

### 5) The Impact of Relationships on Self-Sufficiency and Life Skills Development

Caregivers will learn how to help youth discover their personal assets and add powerful, practical life skills for adulthood.

### 6) Planning for Post-Secondary Education and Employment

There are many resources available to help youth (and their caregivers) prepare for college and/or employment so they can eventually stand on their own. The session will also highlight programs for youth on various permanency paths.

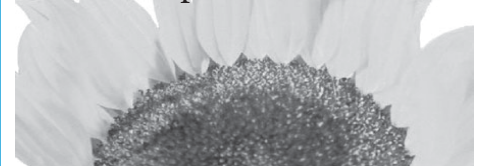
The Caregiver Institutes are open to all DCFS and private agency foster, adoptive, guardianship and relative caregivers. There will be no provisions for childcare and no place for children to stay on site. **Families must not bring children.** The Saturday institutes will begin at 9 a.m. (registration opens at 8:30 a.m.) and end at 3 p.m. Complimentary lunches will be served.

Participants will be able to earn DCFS foster parent training credit hours. Confirmed participants must sign in at the training site on time and attend the full-day institute to receive credit.

**Participants may only register by calling the toll free telephone number for DCFS Registration at 877-800-3393.** CALL today if you wish to attend, as there are only a limited number of seats at each site. The registration number is open Monday-Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. You will receive a confirmation letter via e-mail or post from DCFS after completing the phone registration.

- February 18 - Rend Lake Resort, Whittington
- February 25 - Northfield Suites, Springfield
- March 4 - Hawthorne Suites, Champaign
- March 11 - Four Points Sheraton, Fairview Heights
- March 18 DCFS - 6201 S. Emerald, Chicago
- March 25 - Clocktower Resort, Rockford
- April 8 - Pere Marquette Hotel, Peoria
- April 29 - Hampton Inn & Suites, Aurora
- May 6 - DCFS 1911 S. Indiana, Chicago

There may be limited funds available through the DCFS regions to reimburse DCFS-supervised families for childcare or mileage (not lodging) expenses to attend this training. Caregivers should follow normal procedures within their own region to check on potential reimbursement. Attendees from private agencies should contact their agencies to determine if they can be reimbursed for these expenses.







## CAYIT may be hard to say but is getting good results

Child and Youth Investment Teams have come to be known by the handle “CAYIT”, pronounced *Say-It*. The name is a bit unfamiliar, but since the initiative started in July, the concept of team decision-making among people who are important to a child’s life is taking off.

Child and Youth Investment Teams are the vehicle for determining what happens next when:

- A child’s placement disrupts and he moves to a shelter
- A new case opens and a child’s shelter stay is likely to go beyond seven days
- There is a request to consider Specialized Foster Care
- The youth wishes to move to an Independent Living Option (ILO), a Transitional Living Program (TLP), residential facility or group home
- A child has had three moves in 18 months
- The caregiver or caseworker needs assistance in identifying or accessing more services or supports to maintain the child in the home

The CAYIT meetings focus on the clinical and social needs of the child or youth. The team develops the most effective plan to meet the youth’s needs based on his or her individual strengths and the circumstances of the case. CAYIT has the authority to access available services or programs to meet the needs. Before the end of the meeting, the group must have a consensus agreement on the action plan.

“Consensus doesn’t mean that everyone thinks the same or feels it is the perfect solution. Consensus means that everyone’s opinion was heard and we can agree to support the group’s decision,” said Teddy Savas, Co-Statewide Coordinator for CAYIT.

Caregivers are an important factor to the team decision-making, because they know the children best. Foster parents, whether current, past or prospective, are always asked to join the CAYIT meeting. Other individuals who are important to the child are also included, such as teachers, relatives or mentors.

“CAYIT is about respect and inclusion. Through shared decisions, trust is built,” said Lee Annes, Co-Statewide Coordinator.

To guide the decision process, 11 teams work from DCFS offices around the state with more expansion planned. The teams have been averaging approximately 100 meetings a week. The meetings last up to two hours or however long it takes to reach a consensus. In addition to the caregivers, youth (when appropriate) and the caseworker and supervisor, the CAYIT staff fills several roles:

- **Intake staff** is responsible for determining whether referred cases meet the eligibility and for collecting all required records and reports.
- **Reviewer** works with the caseworker, supervisor and intake staff to identify critical



*Lori Gray, a CAYIT Implementation Coordinator in the Southern Region, describes the new program to the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council*

- participants. Reviewer provides clinical or resource expertise during the meetings.
- **Facilitator** runs the meeting using a Team Decision-Making approach and making sure everyone has a chance to voice an opinion.
- **Implementation Coordinator** facilitates and monitors the implementation of the agreed-upon action plan.

With clearly defined roles, expanded participation and authority to act, CAYIT can lead to better decisions with better information from those who have a real interest in the child. Foster parents who want to convene a CAYIT should ask the youth’s caseworker to make a referral, before it becomes a crisis. CAYIT meetings are open to families served by DCFS and private agencies. Questions about the Child and Youth Investment Teams can be directed to Teddy Savas at 312-814-1071 or Lee at 312-497-2470.

## Clothing counts when a child moves from home

When a child arrives at a new foster home, ideally, he or she would arrive with a well-packed suitcase. When that doesn't happen, one of the first orders of business is to make certain the child has adequate clothing. When a child is placed, foster parents should review the child's current clothing situation with the placing worker. It is also recommended to keep a log of items. Sometimes, when a child is removed from home quickly, the worker will bring clothes later. If the child has been in another foster home, all clothes, toys, personal hygiene items and belongings should be sent to the new foster home. That is the policy, but if it doesn't play out that way in practice, there are some alternatives.

### Initial out-of-home placement

If it is a child's first placement outside the home and the child's clothing appears inadequate, the caseworker may request an "initial clothing voucher." The initial clothing voucher may be requested at the time the case is opened or within six months of the case opening. If several placements are, or have been involved, using several purchase orders, the total expenditure *must not exceed the maximum amount allowable*. That means that if a child comes to a family within the six-month time frame, after having been with another foster family, the total or partial amount of the initial clothing

voucher may have been already used by the previous foster family. Ask the child's caseworker.

The caseworker can also request payment for *initial personal hygiene items* for a child in his/her first placement outside the home when the case is opened. Examples of necessary items are: toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, feminine hygiene items, hairbrush/comb/pick, baby bottles, diapers, baby powder, baby oil and other essential items. Items such as make-up, perfume, jewelry or hairdryers are not allowed under this type of request since the intention is to take care of the child's immediate, basic needs.

DCFS and private agencies all have set procedures for how these items will be purchased. It could be a direct purchase by the caseworker, purchase with an agency voucher or credit card or advance purchase by the caregiver with reimbursement later. DCFS, with input from the State-wide Foster Care Advisory Council, is working to make these procedures as efficient as possible.

### Replacement clothing

Outside of the initial placement, foster parents are expected to replace a child's clothing using the monthly foster care payment. The monthly licensed foster care payment includes funds to pay for a child's clothing according to age. This includes school clothes and

school uniforms and new clothing needed due to changes in season and normal growth. However, the caseworker/agency may request additional funds from DCFS for replacement clothing under these circumstances:

- A child whose clothes are unsuitable due to health or medical reasons, such as extraordinary weight gains or losses, excessive growth, or damage done to clothing to accommodate casts or braces.
- Destruction of clothing by fire, flood, or the child's willful destruction.
- Pregnant teens needing maternity clothes.
- Foster children who had been in a Department of Corrections (DOC) facility and are now returning to foster care.
- Foster children who returned home for an extended period of time and then returned to foster care.

Foster parents should be aware of another aspect of providing clothing for children. If the child's caseworker does not feel that the child's wardrobe is adequate at any time during the placement, he/she will inform the foster parent/s *in writing*. The foster parents will be given 30 days to replenish the child's wardrobe. If this does not happen, the caseworker may request that funds be deducted from the monthly payment to the foster parent/s, up to a maximum allowed for replacement clothing.

## Bridging families during the holiday season

The winter months bring festivities and joy along with a good measure of excitement and holiday cheer. However, this time of year also can intensify feelings of longing for children in or from the foster care system, because it emphasizes the separation from their birth families. Often, these children create memories of idealized parents. It makes life a little more bearable for them to imagine that their birth families are exemplary and that life before foster care was happy. Although this often does not match their real experiences, this type of imagination is common and serves as a kind of emotional protection for them.

Sometimes, when they face the reality of their situation, children will exhibit sadness and significant emotional distress from being separated from their birth families during the holidays. Often, older children are more vulnerable to intense feelings of sadness and anger during the holiday season because they have more memories of the rituals and traditions of their birth families during the holidays. Also, these older children often functioned as “pseudo-parents” before the removal from their families and, as such, they tend to worry about their younger siblings and continue to feel responsible for them.

It is important to provide a healthy outlet for children who may be saddened during the time of year that brings so much joy to

others. Failure to acknowledge the feelings may cause them to be more acute. It is often helpful to create a bridge that connects the birth family, either literally or figuratively, with the current family to compensate for the feelings of separation that occur during this time. Following are a few suggestions to bridge the gap:

1. Ask the child about different holiday dishes that their birth families enjoyed during the holidays. Ask them to help prepare them or share your excitement about preparing them.
2. Take a picture of the entire family, including foster and birth siblings as well as foster parents, and display this picture as part of the holiday decorations.
3. Help the child create holiday cards for their birth family members or past foster parents and mail them.
4. Help the children create an ornament representing their birth family and display it with the other decorations.

There are numerous, creative ways to foster positive interaction across families during the holiday season. The most important suggestion is to listen. Children often will let you know what they need if you listen closely enough. Although feelings of longing and sadness can surface during the holiday season, feelings of comfort and joy are contagious.

***With the children home for the holidays, it helps to have a few aces to keep minds sharp and hands busy. Take a look at these web sites for ideas for free activities and inexpensive craft ideas.***

### Sharpen Math Skills

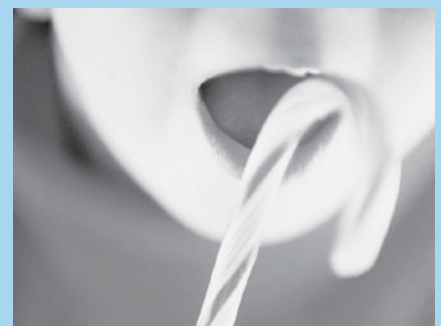
Keep Math skill sharp with free printable math worksheets. The sheets use fun winter themes and graphics to quiz basic math skills. Choose the grade level (from 1 to 5) and type of activity your child will like. [www.kidzone.ws/math/winter/index.htm](http://www.kidzone.ws/math/winter/index.htm).

### Countdown to Christmas

Write to Santa, read stories, enjoy Karaoke, send e-cards, find recipes, play games and puzzles, print stories to color at [www.northpole.com](http://www.northpole.com).

### Crafts to count on

Fill those school-free days with lots of winter crafts that are easy to do. Take a peek at [www.kidsdomain.com/craft/\\_winter.html](http://www.kidsdomain.com/craft/_winter.html) for lots of ideas on neat pictures, cool hair accessories and lots of craft projects to pass away the time constructively.





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## Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council tackles youth issues and licensing policy

The September meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was a combined meeting with the Statewide Youth Advisory Board. Each council enjoys this annual event. The youth agenda included topics of automobile-related issues, such as licenses and insurance. They also discussed allocations for funds for personal hygiene items and clothing. The Adolescent Issues Committee of the adult council will continue to work with the youth boards on issues that overlap. The Council has asked DCFS to send a representative to its next meeting to discuss specific youth concerns. Both councils are also considering a method to meet jointly more frequently.

At the October meeting, The Statewide Foster Care Advisory



*Steven Minter*

Council invited Steven Minter to discuss the changes in development for Rule 402, which covers licensing standards for foster homes.

DCFS objectives are to:

- Standardize the case filing system across the state
- Review 402 to identify items that are outdated or need to be updated
- Review training procedures and documentation of the training hours
- Identify foster homes that have not been active and determine how to better utilize the available resources

Council members volunteered to help as the committee develops the draft policy. The full Council will continue to provide input as the draft policy is completed and prepared for public review.

The November meeting was a joint meeting with the Adoption Advisory Council to discuss objectives for legislative outreach. The councils attended events to celebrate National Adoption month. The Foster Care Council later met to receive training for the upcoming Implementation Plan review process.

The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council is Friday, January 20 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Eastland Suites, 1801 Eastland Dr., in Bloomington.

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## Illinois Adoption Advisory Council focuses on post-adoption

Statewide Adoption Coordinator June Dorn joined the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council to give an analysis of the budget for post-adoption services. More resources will be devoted to Intensive Adoption and Guardianship Preservation Services and other types of post-adoption counseling. Additionally, the Cook County Subsidy Unit, which handles the bulk of cases, will be able to hire more staff.

There are also funds allocated for 14 agencies in different parts of

the state to provide respite programs for adoptive families. The Office of Service Intervention requested agencies to focus resources on programs that provide respite, as this service was often sought by families. For information on the agencies and programs, contact Judy Pence in the DCFS Division of Service Intervention at 217-557-5677.

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The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council has openings for members to represent several areas. The council will consider

nominations of adopted individuals from Cook North, Cook Central and Central regions. The council is also seeking adoptive parents from Cook North and Cook Central. Interested individuals should contact the Office of Foster Parent Support Services at 217-524-2422.

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The next meeting of the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council will be on Friday, February 3 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. The location will be at the Eastland Suites, 1801 Eastland Drive in Bloomington.



## When adopted children get into trouble with the law

Adoptive or guardianship parents may celebrate the fact that finalization signals the end of attorneys and judges and court dates. Yet, even after permanency, youth may come into contact with the law on the criminal side. Then, the phrase “he’s your child, just as if you had him from birth,” has a more profound meaning when a police officer calls. There is no case-worker to page and the responsibility rests on the parent to respond appropriately.

As parents figure out the next steps, here are a few things to consider:

1. Stay calm. Emotions will be high, but take time to clear your head.
2. Call your DCFS Post Adoption/Subsidy contact. Depending on the charge, there may be intervention services that could help.
3. If you have a foster care license, contact your agency. Some youth actions could impact your license.
4. Remember that mandated reporters must call the Child Abuse Hotline if the youth commits an act that endangers another child.
5. Seek legal counsel. The attorney who handled your adoption could be a start. You may need to look for an attorney with experience in criminal defense and/or the juvenile justice system. Try

the local Bar Association for referrals or Legal Aid organizations that offer assistance to low-income families.

6. If the crime involves a mental health issue, consider using the CARES line for statewide referrals to mental health and crisis intervention services in the community at 800-345-9049.
7. Keep a log of contacts that you make so phone numbers are easy to find. Don’t rely on your memory. Track the responsiveness of service providers and your efforts to follow up.
8. Look to other adoptive parents for support and advice. It may help to realize your child is not the first to have a brush with the law.

Know the laws and consequences and discuss them with your child as he or she grows older. Depending on the age of the young person, some crimes, such as sexual assault or murder automatically move to adult court where the stakes are much higher. Teach them about their rights. Rehearse what to do if pulled over in a traffic stop or taken into custody. For example, youth with Attention Deficit Disorder, in addition to acting impulsively, may have trouble answering questions or sequencing events under the best of circumstances and especially when feeling the pressure from the authorities. Preparation can

keep a tough situation from getting tougher.

The report *Adolescence and the Transition to Adulthood* by the University of Chicago researched youth in the juvenile justice system. The study reported:

- About half of juvenile offenders have some sort of mental health disorder. Yet only 10-15% received help for their problems.
- Only 12% of chronic and serious juvenile offenders has a high school diploma or GED before young adulthood.
- Many juvenile offenders also have a family member in the criminal justice system

The odds for juvenile criminal offenses go up with risk factors such as mental health, poor academic performance, immaturity and lack of family ties. Those circumstances are more relevant considering the background of youth who have also been involved with the child welfare system. While you don’t want to look for trouble, it’s wise to anticipate potential problems.

\* \* \*

For more details on the study contact Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago or go to the web site: [www.about.chapinhall.org/conferences/NovATA/Conference\\_Summary\\_Final.pdf](http://www.about.chapinhall.org/conferences/NovATA/Conference_Summary_Final.pdf).





## Adoption news in Illinois Legislature

The Illinois House of Representatives Special Committee on Adoption Reform, chaired by Rep. Sara Feigenholtz (D) held a hearing this fall and took testimony from adoptive parents and adoption attorneys. Among the changes adoptive parents called for were:

- The availability of more services since medical and emotional problems do not go away once an adoption is finalized
- Training for severe emotional disorders to better cope with children's conditions
- Better coordination of services with DCFS after adoption finalization
- An increase in the board rate, recognizing the actual expenses involved in providing care

Testimony from the adoption attorneys covered:

- Concerns about the new DCFS subsidy forms and perceived limitations
- Staffing constraints to handle the increased number of post adoption and post guardianship cases
- Opinions that DCFS makes inconsistent decisions related to service provisions

The legislators in attendance said they wanted to hear from adoptive families more often. Caregivers can get involved by working through the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council. For more information, contact the Office of Foster Parent Support Services at 217-524-2422.

### Keeping families together after a caregiver dies

A new probate law gives judges more latitude in determining the best possible successor guardian for a child or disabled adult when their caregiver dies. Now, judges can use a three-part test to evaluate the appropriateness of a candidate who has a felony conviction. Judges will consider the nature of the offense, date of the offense and evidence of rehabilitation. Families can have more choices about whom they would like to see take care of the child. The law is Public Act 94-579: Keeping Families Together in Guardianship Cases.

For families receiving a DCFS adoption subsidy, Public Act 94-215 becomes effective on January 1, 2006, and will make it easier for DCFS to provide interim subsidy payments to subsequent adoptive parents when children are orphaned after their first adoptive parents passed away. The interim subsidy payments cover the period of time between the death of the adoptive parent and the finalization of the new adoption, when the new subsidy goes into effect. The interim subsidy payments can begin as soon as the interim subsidy is signed. The new law avoids a 'limbo period' of up to several months for the adults who step in at a critical time.

For more information, contact Linda Coon at 312-786-9255.



## On-line course for Adoption Tax Credit

Adoptive families seeking more information on the Adoption Tax Credit can take an on-line course offered by the Adoption Learning Partners. The course includes a description of the tax credit and examples on how it can be applied. There is also a section on how to work with a professional tax preparer as you apply the credit to your tax return.

The Adoption Tax Credit is a complex piece of tax law, but the course provides a convenient way to do the research and outline the necessary documentation.

The course is available at [www.adoptionlearningpartners.org](http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org). DCFS has arranged for fees to be waived for caregivers who adopted through DCFS. After completing the course, you can receive a certificate for your training hours records.

Other on-line courses are:

- Conspicuous Families
- Finding the Missing Pieces
- Becoming Your Child's Best Advocate
- The Journey of Attachment
- With Eyes Wide Open
- Let's Talk Adoption



## Illinois celebrates Adoption Month

On November 18, more than 100 families and individuals joined in celebration of National Adoption Awareness Month at the Richard J. Daley Center in Chicago. The theme for the day was Celebrating Adoptions through the Generations. Several families shared how adoptions had touched their lives. For example, Ella Thomas was adopted out of foster care. She then adopted a daughter out of foster care.

Merri Dee of WGN-TV emceed the adoption awareness event. The celebration kicked off with Uhlich Voices performing original music written by youth in care. Lt. Governor Pat Quinn expressed the administration's appreciation for the commitment that adoptive families make. After remarks from DCFS Director Bryan Samuels and Representative Sara Feigenholtz, the judges were at the ready to help nearly 50 families take the final steps to permanency.

The Illinois Celebrates Adoption committee presented Lt. Governor Quinn with the "Faces of Illinois



*Gwenn Eyer of the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council presents the Faces of Illinois Adoption album to Lt. Governor Pat Quinn. The album included heart-warming photos of families whose lives have been enriched by adoption.*

Adoption" album featuring photographs of diverse adoptive families. The book will be displayed in the Capitol as a lasting reminder of how many lives are touched by adoption.

The Illinois Celebrates Adoption planning committee was generously assisted by the Chicago Bar Association, the Circuit Court of Cook County, DCFS, and several private agencies including: Lakeside Community Committee, Children's Home and Aid, Kid's Hope United, ChildServ, CASA of Illinois and Lutheran Social Services of Illinois.

## Tell it like it is: Readers respond

Families Now and Forever wants to hear the "real deal" on caring for children from those who know best.

The new question is... **What was the most important thing you learned in foster parent training classes or what do you wish had been taught?**

You can contact me with your response by e-mail at [vjames@idcfs.state.il.us](mailto:vjames@idcfs.state.il.us) or by phone at 312-814-6824. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Vanessa James  
Editor



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**Purpose:** To help busy families more effectively parent children currently or formerly in DCFS care. To bring them the best information from the most knowledgeable sources. To promote statewide teamwork in finding permanency for children.

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## A family for me

**Damien [7456]** Damien, 6, loves cartoons and children's television shows, especially Barney. When he's not watching his favorite programs, Damien enjoys splashing in the swimming pool and playing with animals. He takes the bus to school each day and always has a good time in gym and music classes. Damien has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair to go from place to place. However, he is starting to walk with a walker and can almost sit up by himself. While Damien isn't verbal, he can express himself through movement, and he smiles for the people he's closest with. He breathes with the help of a tracheotomy tube.

His worker said Damien has made great progress over the past two years. His caregivers want the best for this young man. The family for Damien would be very patient and loving, and could make a lifetime commitment to his care.

**Killis [7491]** Killis, 12, is an extremely bright young man who often receives As and Bs in school. He is also gifted at sports, and loves to play baseball, basketball, and football. In his free time, Killis enjoys playing with his Game Boy and PlayStation video games and his collection of Beyblade spinning tops.

His foster parent said Killis is "a good kid" who can be very helpful around the house. His

teacher stated that Killis can be an excellent student. Parents for Killis should be caring, patient and trustworthy. Killis would like to remain in contact with his sister. He hopes that his adoptive family will treat him fairly and just like one of their birth children.

**Whitney [7529]** Whitney, 12, is an outgoing, expressive girl who likes to sing and dance. She is especially inspired by gospel music. In addition to her creative gifts, Whitney has good athletic abilities and enjoys swimming and bike riding. She also takes pride in her appearance and likes to have her hair and nails nicely done. Her teachers and foster parents said Whitney does a good job of communicating her feelings. She likes to relax by watching TV and movies. The family for Whitney can encourage her to pursue her creative interests. You can provide her with a safe and stable home. Whitney would like to remain in contact with her brothers and sisters, whom she loves very much.

**Brandon [6906]** Brandon, 12, loves the stereo and TV in his home. He enjoys listening to classical radio stations and Christian worship CDs. He also likes watching Veggie Tales and Disney videos, as long as they're not too scary. When he's not busy with these activities, Brandon enjoys playing with toys that light

up and make noise. His favorite toy is a spinning top that says numbers and plays music. At mealtime, he likes to serve himself finger foods like chicken nuggets or pieces of a peanut butter sandwich. Because of a medical condition, Brandon uses a wheelchair for mobility. He doesn't speak, but he smiles at people he recognizes, and he vocalizes enthusiastically when music is playing.

His foster mother said Brandon is a "smiley guy" who likes being around people. The parent for Brandon could be loving, patient, and kind. You can be energetic and willing to make a long-term commitment to his care.

**Zachary [7154]** Zachary, 12, is a young man who loves sports. Basketball and baseball are his favorites, but he is good at many others as well. When he has quiet time, Zachary enjoys art projects, especially drawing and painting. He behaves well at home and is eager to become close with people who will care about him.

His foster parent and teacher said Zachary likes to try new activities, and he is willing to work hard at tasks that are difficult for him. The family for Zachary would be loving and patient. Zachary will benefit from having a safe and stable home environment. He said he would like to join a family that is friendly and kind.

**If you are interested in adopting one of these children or learning about other children waiting to be adopted, please call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois at 1-800-572-2390, or see the AICI web site – [www.adoptinfo-il.org](http://www.adoptinfo-il.org).**



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Call the Adoption Information Center of Illinois 800-572-2390.



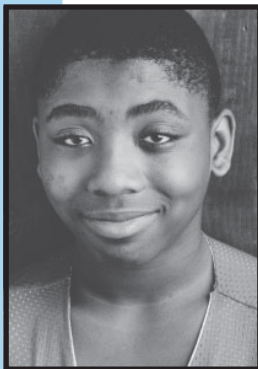
**Register Now for the 2006 Caregivers Institutes**

## Inside this issue:

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- Page 3 Registration info for 2006 Caregivers Institutes
- Page 4 Update on Child and Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) meetings
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- Page 7 Illinois Adoption Advisory Council Update
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- Page 9 New laws ease family planning for adoptive parents



**Damien [7456]**



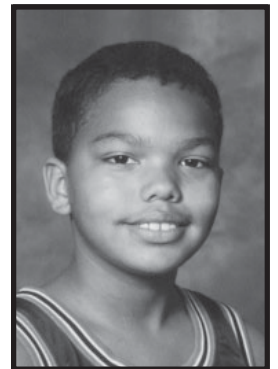
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